



Zero Beat



Hampden County Radio Association, Inc. - our 47th ARRL affiliated year

September 1994

Volume 3 Issue 1

Contesting Tips From an Old Pro.....

Next HCRA Meeting.....

Contesting is one aspect of amateur radio that is enjoyed by a considerable portion of the amateur radio fraternity evident by the variety of activities available almost every weekend. To name a few contests and contest-like activities: DX contests sponsored by the ARRL, CQ magazine and many other international organizations; Field Day, QSO parties sponsored by many amateur radio clubs, SPRINT, and Simulated Emergency Tests (SETs). Contest operating helps improve operating skills and generally leads to making improvements in station equipment and layout. Information presented here will be, for the most part, non-specific as to contest or activity. Tips pertaining to station layout, operating and the operator are presented. Single operator or multi-operator/single transmitter, right-handed operator, and real time computer logging are assumed. Even if you log by hand, you might find these tips quite helpful. They have worked for me.

The following tips are directed mainly to the beginner or prospective contester. The veteran may also find an idea or two that will be helpful. Read on.

Station Layout

1. Place a digital clock, video monitor, and antenna direction indicator directly in front of the operator to minimize head movement. The monitor should be at eye level and about 3 feet from the operator.

2. The keyboard should be 26 inches off the floor unless you have a variable height chair. Arm rests are usually not desirable when using a keyboard.

3. The transceiver should be to the left and tuned with the left hand. Equipment placed on the table should form an arc instead of a



This month will feature a very informative meeting about packet radio. Be sure to attend!

straight line.

4. The amplifier, if you use one, should be to the right and tuned with the right hand. Have a calibration chart for quick band changes.

5. Place the keyer paddle to the right and the speed control to the left if they are separate units.

6. Use a PTT foot switch for smooth and fast operation if you don't have a good VOX or break-in system.

7. Use a foot operated antenna rotation control. A heavy duty center-off single-pole double-switch can be found at any auto parts store.

8. Use light weight earphones with a boom mike when operating phone.

9. Place the antenna selector switch so it is within easy reach and readable.

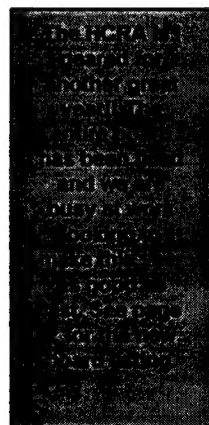
10. Have a good comfortable chair. Adequate padding is essential for extended operating periods.

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The next Hampden County Radio Association will Take place on Friday night September 9, 1994 and will feature a meeting about Packet Radio Basics. Come and spend an informative meeting on how to install and operate a simple packet station. Please note that this is not the first Friday of the month as usual. It will be later this month because of the Labor Day holiday weekend.

**Feeding Hills
Congregational Church
JCT of Routes 57 & 187
Feeding Hills, Massachusetts**

Starting this month, the HCRA will be taking attendance at each meeting. We will have a 'welcome table' at the main entrance in order to make you, the member feel as welcome as possible. Many of our new members have expressed concern that they have come to meetings in the past and have been completely ignored. The idea of a 'welcome table' is to help us recognize new people by socializing with them and recognizing their membership in the HCRA.



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Contesting Tips (Cont.).....

11. Packet radio is a good adjunct if you don't mind being in the "assisted operator" category. A packet interface to your computer will put packet announcements on your screen and permit use of your computer keyboard for making announcements.

12. Generous use of ferrite cores and beads will minimize or eliminate RFI, TVI, and telephone RFI. Telephone ferrite filters with modular connectors work great.

13. Provide good lighting and avoid eye strain.

14. Check out the equipment and antenna system well ahead of the contest date and make any needed adjustments and repairs.

15. For domestic contests, consider using antenna height of 35-40 feet. Put up dipoles for the lower frequency bands, if you don't have any antennas for those bands. Try feeding your tower for 160M.

16. Have a snack table or TV tray within reach. Don't put coffee cup or food on the operating table/desk. If you smoke watch the ashes.

17. Have a note paper, sharp pencils, and erasers readily available. If by chance you are logging by hand, have correct log forms on hand, as well as a dupe sheet.

18. If a neighbor is also in the contest, try

switching in transmission line quarter-wave section filters of RG174 or RG 58 at the receiver input to minimize adjacent band interference.

Operating

1. Know your equipment. Thorough knowledge in the use of all controls on your transceiver such as CW and SSB filters, audio filters, bandpass tuning, dual VFOs, noise blanker, memories, and split frequency operation will greatly enhance your operating ability.

2. Check out your computer and logging program. The *N6TR Logging Program* and *CT* by K1EA are excellent and accommodate a variety of contests. *CT* Version 8 with a digital voice processing board handles SSB as well as CW contests which makes it easy on the vocal cords.

3. Know the requirements of the contest such as the starting and ending times and dates, message exchange, scoring, multipliers, etc. which are available from the sponsor of the activity.

4. Set a goal for yourself or enter into a competition with a fellow club member or friend who is participating. Make a rate chart and monitor your progress.

5. Check propagation conditions forecasts before the contest. Consult propagation charts in the latest *QST*, *CQ* magazine, or *Worldradio*. Monitor WWV propagation reports. If you have a computer program that will draw MUF charts, plot your own just before the contest. Know at what times different band will be open to various parts of the world. Propagation conditions on the east coast

are not the same as the west coast so don't waste a lot of time trying to work the same DX. Go back periodically, say an hour or two and try again.

6. Periodically check the status of multipliers yet to be worked. Look for them when you think the band will be open to them.

7. Know what DXpeditions are out there. Check the various ham magazines and DX bulletins to find out. Make a list of their calls, QTH and QSL information if you need it.

8. Use beam headings on the *N6TR* or *CT* programs. Use CTYHDG.EXE available on the earlier versions of *CT* or download it from the K1EA BBS if you're a registered owner. You enter your latitude and longitude and the program will update the country list with beam

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President's Message

Greetings! I hope everyone has been having a great, safe summer, and is looking forward to a fun, interesting year of programs.

As this year's president, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Barry Mason, and my callsign is N1IJK. I have been licensed and a member of HCRA for three years, serving on the Board of Directors for one year. My ham interests include HF DX'ing, ragchewing, and anything having to do with antennas. Lately I've also been looking into VHF/UHF SSB. That's the great thing about this hobby, there's always something else to try. My non-radio interests include astronomy, scuba diving, photography, anything science related, and reading.

O.K. - Back to business. When you enter the church this month to attend this month's meeting, you'll notice something new - we will have a table at the entrance staffed by a member of the Board. The purpose of this is to welcome both old and especially new members to the HCRA. The Board is making one of its' priorities this year to identify and welcome new hams, or licensed hams returning from an absence from the hobby.

If you know anyone who has been thinking about taking the plunge, bring them along! This month's meeting is especially made for both new and old hams; Mike Tracy, KC1SX, from League HQ, will show how to set up a packet station without having to get a degree in computer science. Of course if you have any kind of questions Mike can help you out, but there have been requests by the membership on how to set up a station, and how to connect up.

If you have any ideas on programming you would like to see, let us know. You have a Board of Directors and Officers who are interested in bringing interesting programs to you, so let us know what sounds good to you.

See you Friday the 9th!

73, Barry N1IJK

Contesting Tips (Cont.).....

headings from your QTH. Whenever you enter a call, the country prefix will appear with the correct beam heading for you. The *N6TR* program also provides an easy means for including beam headings to the countries list.

9. As a general rule, work the highest band open. Check other bands every now and then to be sure you don't miss an opening.

10. Use ITU phonetics.

11. Always answer calls with the same phonetics used by the calling station, especially DX. If you're using CT with DVP and he used other than ITU phonetics, give his call orally and press F2 (exchange) instead of INSERT.

12. Give 'big guns' only one call as you run across them. Don't wait in line to work them unless it's a new multiplier. They will be around for the entire contest and you can work them later on when things are slow.

13. Log call signs accurately as well as the exchange. There is a penalty for inaccurate call signs or exchanges in most contests.

14. Catch the easy multipliers as you run across them. Easy double multipliers (W, VE, KL7, KH6, and zones 1, 3, 4, and 5) can be found on 160, 80, and 40. These are easiest to work the first night.

15. As the contest wears on, take note of the value of a new multiplier versus more QSOs. CT will tell you this or as a general rule TOTAL QSOs / TOTAL MULTS at that point will give you the value of one multiplier in number of QSOs. Contacts that are double multipliers are twice as valuable. Bands you have operated on the least will probably bear more double multipliers. You decide if you want to hunt multipliers or make more QSOs.

16. Use memories to store frequencies of needed multipliers and band edges for quick reset instead of spinning the dial back.

17. If you don't work a station after three or four calls, you might not be in his band pass. Change your frequency slightly.

18. In a big pile-up, timing of the call is very important. Delaying your call slightly will often bear fruit.

19. If you get a run or pile-up going, work the fast operator first, the slower operator will usually hang in there for you whereas the fast ones will not. If there is heavy calling and it's too difficult to pick out calls, turn down the RF gain which often helps to pick out the stronger signals. Use the filters! Consider calling for districts, prefixes or other geographical breakdown. Also consider working split frequency, listening a few kHz higher than your transmit frequency.

20. Learn to handle partial calls quickly. On

CW, e.g. JF3B? 59903 or on SSB "the JF3B station 5903" and get the complete call on the return when he/she will repeat their call. In regard to using partial calls, I prefer to send my complete call when calling stations and have stations calling me give their complete call. It's faster than repeating the full call on the next transmission. Unless, of course, the station I'm calling asks for partial calls.

21. Avoid all unnecessary transmission. R (your call) or TU (your call) is shorter and just as courteous as 73, QSL, or CUL.

22. CQ versus Search and Pounce. The basic idea behind CQing is that if you don't have a signal on the air, nobody knows you're there. Even with a modest station CQing can be quite productive. Try the general class portion of the band or find a clear frequency out of ear shot of a big gun. If a few CQs are not productive, go back to search and pounce or change bands.

23. To find a 'hole' for CQing, search up and down the band and call CQ where you find a spot the appears empty. If you get answer, stay there. More next month. 73, George Leone, K6SG

Reprinted from *Worldradio*

Contest Calendar

The following list is of the major contests that occur in a given year. Use it as a guide for the remainder of the 1994 season and into 1995. The HCRA is usually active in the January VHF Sweepstakes and Field Day. In 1993 the HCRA won as a group for the entire United States in our category! If you never have had an opportunity to try a contest, give it a try! Contests are an excellent way to build up operating skills or chase after that long awaited new DX country or new state. Whatever award you might be after, a contest is an excellent way to achieve it. See QST or CQ magazine for the rules of these contests.

January

- ARRL VHF Sweepstakes
- CQ Worldwide 160M Contest (CW)

February

- ARRL Novice Roundup
- ARRL DX Contest (CW)
- CQ Worldwide 160M Contest (phone)

March

- ARRL DX Contest (phone)
- CQ WPX Contest (phone)

May

- CQ WPX Contest (CW)

June

- ARRL VHF QSO Party
- ARRL Field Day (Always on the last full weekend)

July

- IARU HF World Championship (phone + CW)
- CQ VHF WPX Contest

September

- ARRL VHF QSO Party

October

- CQ Worldwide DX Contest (phone)

November

- ARRL Sweepstakes (CW)
- ARRL Sweepstakes (phone)
- CQ Worldwide DX Contest (CW)

December

- ARRL 10-Meter Contest (phone and CW)

Don't Just Stand There. Do Something!

It is a natural tendency for most people to come to a meeting of a social, community, civic, political, or for that matter, any club and feel that not doing anything is the best course of action. Why? Because, it is very easy to feel that if we undertake something we were not told to do, someone is going to make a negative comment about it.

Being new (or even if we have been around for a while) one sometimes has the feeling of the outsider. Maybe we shouldn't undertake anything unless we are specifically directed by "an officer or a board member" to do it. After all, they are in charge ... right? Wrong! The officer or board member is NOT IN CHARGE, their function is to assume responsibility to make the member's club experience more enjoyable.

So, who's in charge? You, the member. You are in charge!

In charge of what? In charge of participating, of taking an active role in the club, of doing anything that needs to be done. Even if you are an officer or member of the board, your most important function is that of club member. The club is, after all, a society of equals, no higher, no lower. The hierarchy exists only for administrative convenience and to have "... the honor to serve."

So I am standing here; what can I do? Whatever you feel is constructive! One time it may be setting up the chairs for the meeting, another may be to make sure that there is some chalk around for the blackboard (by the speaker or anyone else). Maybe volunteering to bring the cookies and/or doughnuts for the meeting, or the soda for drinking. Maybe preparing a pot of coffee, or operating the club station during the meeting night if your club has one.

Hey, I got an idea! Why don't I grab a broom and help clean the meeting hall. Maybe I can make a sign to use in the club? Or come up with an idea and act upon it, for something I think should be part of the club. Oh heck, there are 100 things that can be done to improve a club. All it takes is doing and if you think it is the right thing, go ahead. Chances are that you're right. It's better to do something, even if it doesn't turn out perfect, than to do nothing!

So, don't just stand there. Do something! And thanks for trying.

73, Fred Skinner, K2DN - Reprinted from *Worldradio*, November 1993.



Zero Beat is a monthly publication except in July and August by the Ham Radio Council of America, Inc. Any article may be reprinted as long as credit is given to the publication and its author(s). This issue would not be possible without the help of Larry Griffin and his computer equipment. Thanks, Editor

September Meeting: Packet Radio Basics

Friday September 9, 1994

Doors Open at 7:30 P.M.

Meeting will begin at 8:00

Don't Forget! The HCRA's annual Auction - November 7, 1994

Calling all Hams. Calling all Hams.

The Southwick Fire Department is having their annual parade and needs volunteers for parade radio operators. Contact Daniel McKay, N1RAL, at the September meeting. Or, you can contact him at home between 3:00 and 8:00 p.m. at 413-569-3319.

This Months' Special:

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Special Contest Issue of Zero Beat

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